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Islington Climate Change Partnership

Abstract

Through the work of the Islington Strategic Partnership (ISP) and the establishment of a Climate Change Partnership (CCP), Islington has successfully integrated climate change into the SCS and LAA. Highlights include:

- The CCP engaged organisations in the Borough, including organisations from the business sector;
- Member organisations were asked to commit to targets to reduce their carbon emissions by 15% by 2010;
- The 2006-9 LAA includes targets for reducing carbon emissions from the Borough as a whole, and from members of the CCP.

The issue

Islington is a small but very densely populated inner city area in London. It is the sixth most deprived local authority in the country, with 75% of its residents living in a deprived area, and yet it also has some of the most expensive private housing, with an average house price of £449,000.

The SCS identifies this contrast and the effects of poverty, unemployment and the lack of affordable housing as the key challenges that need to be tackled. The Borough Council has also had a long commitment to addressing sustainable development and a good track record on energy management, but these issues had not previously been linked with the Neighbourhood Renewal agenda.

What Islington did

The key organisations and groups have been the Borough Council, the ISP (and, in particular, its Environment and Sustainability (E&S) Theme Group) and the CCP.

The initial driver was the Borough Council, focusing on its own carbon emissions. The Council's Sustainability Unit was instrumental in establishing the CCP, with support and funding from the E&S Theme Group, as it thought that a partnership would help it meet the targets in the Sustainability Action Plan (SAP). When the first LAA was being negotiated in 2005 the Sustainability Unit proposed an indicator on carbon dioxide reductions. Although this required some negotiation, the Council Sustainability Unit's strong track record gave the E&S Theme Group the confidence to support the work.

Subsequently, the ISP's E&S Theme Group has used its funding to support the work on climate change for over two years. It funds a council based CCP Coordinator and a Carbon Advisor, employed by the Council. It supports carbon reduction work in schools by Global Action Plan, and an innovative "green behaviours" project on housing estates run by Groundwork and Futerra. The Chair of the Theme Group is the Director of Islington Law Centre and also sits on the ISP Executive and Board meaning she has been able to act as a conduit to those bodies.

The members of the Climate Change Partnership itself have also been important in this process. It now has 100 members including the Borough's largest employers and biggest carbon emitters such as hospitals, universities, a football club, and transport providers.

The impact

The work by the Borough Council and ISP is a good example of how to address the issue of climate change effectively in an area of high deprivation. It has been done in a way that has consistently raised the profile of the issue and the need for actions; has steadily built up consensual support for and agreement about key actions; has actively sought to make real immediate changes where possible and secure commitments to change from partners; has identified the links between climate change and the SCS priorities of reducing poverty, improving access for all and realising everyone's potential and successfully integrated these issues to effect change. The initial work has stimulated further support from the Council in terms of a climate change fund. Within the SCS, each of the three priorities includes sub-objectives on addressing environmental issues, including fuel poverty, public transport and climate change. This reflects an acceptance that the work on climate change mitigation and adaptation is an area where the ISP can address a cross-cutting environmental issue that has wide-reaching implications in terms of sustainability and social wellbeing; it is partly about preparing vulnerable people to deal with the impacts of climate change and to secure their quality of life and the sustainability of their environment. It has also ensured that work on green behaviour change is targeted and designed to address the needs of the 'harder to reach' business sector and deprived groups.

Lessons

Key success factors:

Leadership and advocacy

There is clear Member leadership on climate change and the ISP is chaired by the Leader of the Council. Within the Environment and Sustainability Theme Group, the Council Members and Officers have acted as champions for the environment and particularly on climate change issues. The Council's Sustainability Unit made the case for including a specific climate change target and provided appropriate information to influence and give confidence to other members of ISP. The Theme Group has had to lobby hard to ensure that climate change was included alongside other competing priorities, and this reflects the active involvement of all members of the Group, and the way in which they used their own networks to influence the ISP. The Council has also demonstrated leadership in establishing a £3million Climate Change Fund to support sustainable transport and renewable energy schemes in homes, council buildings and local community buildings; another national first. In investing £3m into the Climate Change Fund, the council has invited residents to donate the £20 discount that they receive as a result of paying their council tax by direct debit, directly to the scheme. Over 1,300 residents have already taken up this option.

Attitudes and culture

Within the Council and the E&S Theme Group, there is a high level of commitment to tackling climate change. The Council has an established track record in addressing environmental issues, which has developed a strong commitment from staff. This has helped create a culture of treating environmental issues seriously. It has helped give other members of the ISP confidence in the knowledge and competence of the Council.

Within the Council, stretching carbon reduction targets have been set and volunteer staff members (Green Liaison Officers) have been mobilised to look at ways of improving the Council's energy efficiency and carbon management and encourage internal behaviour changes.

The Mayor of London's support for climate change action has also been an important factor in setting the tone and providing the policies (London Plan) for London boroughs to take action on reducing carbon emissions, particularly through planning policy.

Skills and competencies

Within the Council, the Environmental Sustainability Division has 30 staff with a range of specialist and generalist skills. The Council believe that it is important to have a mixture of skills, and that different skills are relevant in different situations. For example, the E&S Theme Group Support Officer and the Climate Change Partnership Coordinator have partnership-working backgrounds, with the latter receiving specialist training with regards to climate change. The energy and nature conservation teams have highly specialist skills. The Carbon Advisor has specialist skills, which have been crucial to the success of the CCP, as they provide tailored support to the members.

As discussed above, skills in lobbying and consensus building within the Sustainability Unit have been important to the inclusion of climate change in the SCS. Within the theme group the different skills and perspectives of the members have been valuable, as have been their links to other networks.

Tools

An important tool has been the use of the baseline survey for carbon emissions. This provides the ground for establishing the overall targets and targets for individual organisations. There are a range of other resources used in the behaviour change work and schools programme.

Barriers faced and how they were overcome

The case study on the CCP lists a number of barriers that were experienced in establishing the Partnership. In terms of integrating climate change within the work of ISP, a potential barrier has been the ISP focus on poverty. However, the Council and E&S Theme Group have been effective in making the case within the ISP that climate change is an issue that has to be addressed within an anti-poverty agenda.

Another potential barrier identified by ISP staff is sustaining success into the future. The energy and carbon-related targets can only be achieved over a relatively long period. This requires a sustained commitment to cultural and behavioural changes and adaptations to climate change over that period (and beyond), becoming embedded as 'second nature' in mainstream thinking. This requires ongoing renewal and development, both within the Council and within ISP to ensure the messages continue to have a freshness and weight in terms of sustaining continuous change at the right level and to the right extent. The challenges are to sustain the leadership, interest and associated resources over this period; continue to widen uptake and commitment in the Borough and influence beyond, where possible; and at the same time, deepen people's understanding of the complex and shifting climate-related issues and deepen their commitment to actions that will mitigate and adapt to climate changes.

The support provided which built that capability

The support provided by the Council, financially and as a champion for the environment has been crucial. The ISP commitment has also been important, and has brought significant funding for climate projects in the order of £600,000 over three years, including funding for the CCP. The Sustainability Unit have also built up funding from other sources for specific projects, such as energy advice and work with schools.

The development of the CCP was well supported by local organisations. The Council comment that they were surprised how easy it was to get business buy in. They put this down to the clear target and package of support, purely focussed on carbon reduction. A lot of businesses see it as part of their local credibility. The success of the partnership has reinforced ISPs commitment to the issue, and it was a key factor in gaining agreement on the LAA target.

Support from GOL was also important. They were prepared to let ISP spend the first year of the LAA undertaking the baseline survey to establish the target.

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